

*From the desk of:
Todd A. DuBord
Chaplain of Top Kick Productions*

11/30/10

Mrs. Cindy MacLeod
Superintendent of Independence National Historical Park
143 S. Third Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Dear Mrs. MacLeod:

I am in receipt of your response letter to me, dated (by stamp only) Oct. 15, 2010. Unfortunately, it was neither sent to my return address nor an address that even exists in my town. And, if I were not to know personally the postmaster and his colleagues, I might have never received it.

Nevertheless, I sincerely appreciate you taking the time to write me back about our tour group's grievance with the National Park Service (NPS) regarding our NPS guide's historical fabrications and errors about our founding fathers at Independence Hall, Philadelphia. Our grievance and concern goes far beyond us, however, as we are concerned that the millions of others (including school children from across the nation) who visit there each year don't experience what we did.

In my previous letter to you and 30 pages of subsequent research (posted now on my website at www.NationalTreasures.org), I exhaustively detailed a rebuttal regarding what the NPS ranger presented and why dozens of us on the tour were infuriated with his false and misleading information about our founders religious life and beliefs. Specifically, our primary grievance was based upon the following five core statements he made, before elaborating on each point:

- (1) "There is no record that George Washington ever attended church!"¹
- (2) While the NPS ranger physically hunched over, mimicked and mocked one carrying and swinging an oversized bible in his hand, he said to the crowd: "Even if I said the founders were Christians, how could we really know? Just because people carry a big ol' Bible in their hand, they can still be atheists!"
- (3) "Most of these men owned slaves. How could good Christians do that?"
- (4) "We know that Benjamin Franklin was a deist."
- (5) "We don't really know for sure about their religion. It's open for interpretation. You'll have to do your own study on that."

Again, his sentiment was bad enough in that he retorted with only, and I mean only, negative comments on the founders' religious views and practice, but that they were also lies or half-truths clearly used to attack and undermine their faiths. In the very house in which our founders adopted a Creator-filled Declaration of Independence, should we not have expected at least one positive comment was made about any one of the founders' Christian faiths?

I do not wish to disrespect you or others at Independence Hall, but it was genuinely sad to read how your letter to me softened and even sidestepped the NPS ranger's culpability by brushing over the blatant historical lies taught by him. And your letter raised further flags about the possible deficiencies in the Independence Hall training system, by stating that, though receiving some education about 18th century American religion, "Each ranger leads a tour in his or her own way,...allow[ing] visitors to draw their own conclusions."

But first, you responded in your letter, "Park staff receive training in subject matter content, including the historical debates over religious freedom and the significance in 18th century life." If that were the case, then our park ranger was obviously absent from those days of training or he received his false information from the training he was given. I can't imagine what your religious education training materials contain, if the NPS ranger's teaching was reflective of it. How else is our tour group supposed to reconcile the NPS ranger's lies about our early republic with your words that they are trained on the subject?

As a taxpayer who pays for NPS operation, I requested from you in my first letter a copy of the NPS guides' religious training materials, so that I might convey to others in the group that they are properly trained. I'll ask again as I did in the first letter: might I receive a copy of that training material, or is it confidential or all lecture material? Once trained, are the NPS rangers asked to lead the trainers on test tours, who, in turn, grill the rangers with even the hottest of questions, to assure they can handle them with tact, attitude and accuracy? Are they tested on their ability to separate personal bias from accurate historical instruction? Again, if this were done, our NPS ranger might not have got so defensive and antagonistic.

You further wrote, "Park rangers should be able to respond to most questions posed by visitors on a wide variety of topics but may not always have the time to discuss an issue at length before needing to move on to the next program." The problem is: even when he had sufficient time, our NPS ranger was unable to answer or tell the truth about a basic question about our founders' religious affiliation. If he didn't know the answers, he should have simply stated so after I asked my question (again, which he solicited during a Q&A time), instead of going on an exclusively negative diatribe against their religious lifestyles and beliefs.

In your letter, you borderline condoned and defended the NPS ranger, with whom you said you spoke personally, by writing, "We regret that your guide may not have handled himself as deftly as we would prefer and that he was not able to get his point across in a clear and successful manner." On the contrary, he was "able to get his point across clear and successful" and with so much absolute conviction and antagonism that it led all of us to engage in this grievance campaign. What's not "clear" about his above five negative statements about our founder's Christianity?

Chiefly, is your official statement of culpability really contained within the few words, “We regret that your guide may not have handled himself as deftly as we would prefer”? Do you not see how that comes across as minimizing his falsities? It further gives little, if no, assurance that what we experienced will not happen to another group in the future. Quite frankly, we assumed a person of your stature would convey a strong denunciation, rather than his quasi-defense and a nominal ordering of a “refresher” course on the subject.

Still, we’re sincerely grateful to read in your letter that the “upcoming training program for all park interpreters includes refresher training on this subject,” which I assume is the religious (and Christian) background of our founders? We are unconvinced, however, as to the impact of this “refresher” course, being that we do not know if its “refresher predecessor” or the original training contained anything different than the very distortions our NPS ranger passed on to us during our tour. In other words, what power does a “refresher” course have if the original training information is deficient? Have you had revised or updated the original training information regarding our founders’ religious affiliation, belief and practice? There is no way for us to know or be assured of that in the letter your response wrote.

We do realize, as you wrote in your letter, “The number, scope and complexity of the stories that could be told on a tour on Independence Hall are enormous...as [a tour] can be only 30 minutes long...” Again, the problem isn’t how many stories were told, but that all of them discussed about our founders Judeo-Christian belief and practice were negative, misleading and/or flat out lies and biased distortions of history. Again, having been a teacher to teachers for three decades, I can almost guarantee by the presentation alone that there is either a severe deficiency in the training regarding the religious (and Christian) education and practice of our founders, or your guides are taking liberty to invoke their own bias, despite it being false—something I fear now is not only being allowed but condoned.

This leads me to what is perhaps a sign of the systemic problem that served as a catalyst for our NPS guide’s historical distortions. You wrote, “Each ranger leads a tour in his or her own way, weaving stories and information around core topics such as the drafting of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.” Any veteran trainer knows that such directional fluidity in this context will give sway to personal bias and even the perpetuity of falsehoods from a politically-correct culture. Or do we not think that the admonition that “each ranger leads a tour in his or her own way” will be interpreted and applied as “each ranger teaches the content of a tour as he or she prefers”?

You added, “Our staff is taught to present tours from multiple points of view and allow visitors to draw their own conclusions...” About what subjects? All of them? The signers’ names? Who wrote the two key documents? The history of their drafting or ratification? Who was present at the First Continental Congress? Who sat in which chair in Independence Hall? Or are you speaking reference to our founders’ religious affiliation when you say that your staff presents “multiple points of view and allow visitors to draw their own conclusions”? Because, if that’s the case, that is not what our NPS ranger did at all. It is simply unclear to what subjects or topics are you referring in the words “multiple points of view,” or are you referring to the guests’ multiple points of view? And regarding which subjects do you “allow visitors to draw their own conclusions?” My hope is that you are not supporting the #5 statement our NPS guide made:

“We don’t really know for sure about their religion. It’s open for interpretation. You’ll have to do your own study on that.”

If you are referencing the founders’ religious affiliation or church attendance, I, as one formally trained in religious history, apologetics and interpretation, can assure you that the subject is definitely no mystery. There is simply no rocket science (or advanced religious education) needed to answer my simple question to the NPS ranger: “Can you tell me a little about these founders’ religious affiliation?” If he had the most minimal education on the matter, he could have easily conveyed any part of the information that I also conveyed on page 20 of my initial letter and research to you, but he contradicted their clear, non-debatable biographical facts at every turn:

Many today may not realize that there was an active clergy (Presbyterian minister John Witherspoon) among the signers of the Declaration of Independence. And two others had been previously ministers. Others were sons of clergy. Virtually all were Protestant Christians. Most signers of the Constitution were also Protestant Christians, except two, Carroll and Fitzsimons, who were Roman Catholics.

Among the signers of the Declaration of Independence alone, Christian confessions or affirmations of faith can also be easily found among the writings, speeches or actions of most, including Samuel Adams, Josiah Bartlett, Benjamin Franklin, Elbridge Gerry, John Hancock, Samuel Huntington, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas McKean, John Morton, Robert Treat Paine, Benjamin Rush, Roger Sherman, Richard Stockton, Thomas Stone, John Witherspoon, Oliver Wolcott, etc.²

The same is true of the writings, actions and/or practices of the signers of the Constitution, like Gunning Bedford, Jacob Broom, Charles Carroll, John Dickinson, Alexander Hamilton, John Hart, William Samuel Johnson, James Madison, James McHenry, Gouverneur Morris, William Paterson, Roger Sherman, etc.³ (Remember, these don’t include a long list of others who influenced, aided the influence, ratified or defended the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution).

M.E. Bradford, late history professor at the University of Dallas, discovered that at least 50, perhaps 52, of the 55 delegates to the Constitutional Convention professed to be orthodox, Trinitarian believers who were in good standing at various Christian churches. Bradford found that there were 28 Episcopalians, 8 Presbyterians, 7 Congregationalists, 2 Lutherans, 2 Dutch Reformed, 2 Methodists, 2 Roman Catholics, and only 3 Deists.⁴

Even according to “Founders: A Brief Overview” on the National Archives Experience website⁵ and “Signers of the Constitution: Biographical Sketches,” National Park Service website,⁶ “Williamson, Madison, Ellsworth, and possibly others had studied theology but had never been ordained.” Abraham Baldwin was a minister. Often these men were influential in the creation of their home state constitutions, and every state constitution was created with recognition, allegiance to and/or dependence upon Almighty God.⁷

Virtually every signer received an education (public or otherwise) that was steeped in the Judeo-Christian religion. As you know, most of our early prestigious universities in America were embedded in theological training (Harvard, Yale, Princeton, etc.). It is estimated that nearly half (24 of 56) of the signers of the Declaration of Independence had eighteenth-century equivalents of bible college or seminary degrees.⁸

Most of the preceding information regarding America's founders' religious affiliation and practice is neither conjecturable points nor a matter of private interpretation. It is straightforward biography. For example, whether or not George Washington attended church is not debatable history—it's historical fact. He attended St. Paul's Chapel in New York, was a member and vestryman of Pohick Church and Christ's Church in Virginia, as well as Christ Church in Philadelphia, which was only blocks away from Independence Hall. (In my initial letter, I even personally transcribed for you the entire 5-minute video of Washington's Christian belief and practice, played for visitors at his estate, Mt. Vernon, in Virginia—if it is plainly taught at his own estate, shouldn't it also be so taught where he presided as president of the Constitutional Convention?). What's definitely untrue is what our NPS ranger shared in Independence Hall, "There is no record that George Washington ever attended church."

In the end, teaching on multiple points of view is fine, but when those points of view are false and misleading histories, how else are visitors to "draw their own conclusions" about what was true? Is that really the way the tours should be conducted at what you even admit in your letter is "the most important sites related to the founding of the United States"? If it wouldn't be tolerated in any of the thousands of universities across the country, should it be tolerated in one of the "most important sites related to the founding of the United States"?

Again, my main concern is content, not methodology. So, let me reiterate, that our NPS ranger was VERY well versed and educated on every other aspect (subject) of the founders he addressed via his presentation and the questions asked by the audience, except our founders' religious affiliation and practice. It was not a matter of interpretation. He completely and entirely botched that single subject. And the question we still keep asking ourselves is: how could there be such a polarization in his knowledge, education and presentation? If not having systemic origin in your training, then why has he been able to convey such religious bias and lies? And for how long has he? Or how long would he have been able to do so, if no one came along and contested what he was saying?

Lastly, if I may indulge you a moment further, I'll mention just one more point I wrote to you in my first letter, which was very important but not addressed in your response letter. While it was good to see in the teacher-training materials on Independence National Historic Park's website (in the article "Daily Life and Diversity in 18th Century Philadelphia") some inclusions on Bishop William White (rector of several churches in Philadelphia, chaplain of the continental congress, etc), the historical-religious content regarding our founders' Christian background, beliefs, practices and contributions was virtually non-existent. About the most reported is: "Christ Church started in 1695 as an Anglican Church of England and is still in use today as an Episcopal Church. Its members included signers of the Declaration of Independence, colonial leaders, and everyday citizens. Many famous people are buried in its burial ground, including Ben Franklin." Moreover, the curriculum material for teachers about Benjamin Franklin's life (a whopping 56 pages for K-12 grades) does not mention one iota about Franklin's religious background, beliefs, contributions, attendance at church, etc.⁹ Any chance anything more about our founders' religious affiliation and practice can be added to your website?

Mrs. MacLeod, as I mentioned in the beginning of this letter, I sincerely don't wish to disrespect you or the NPS ranger who led our tour. And I assume that you must want the best and most

accurate teachings at all the historic places under your auspices. I don't want to write a 3rd time nor be a further hindrance to you. I only wanted to address our grievances as a tour group, and, in turn, give our tour group and now a host of others across America, who have been notified of this event by media and the Internet, the assurance of clear culpability that there was a flagrant violation of the retelling of religious history at the Independence Hall. In addition, as taxpayers who pay for NPS and tours, we need the assurance that this will not happen again to others (especially school children), who may not have historians on their tour, as we did, who knew better and could offer corrections.

Unfortunately, in my own estimation and I believe most who will read it, your response letter curtails NPS culpability and assurance that a similar situation might arise again in the future for visitors touring Independence Hall. But I'll allow others to make their own judgments as they read our letters for themselves, continue to ask your rangers and tour guides questions on our founders' Christian belief and practice, etc.

I will be posting yours and my correspondence on my website and notifying various media outlets of this revisionist episode update, which they are expecting. I will also continue to encourage citizen response and accountability of Independence Hall tour guides and executives by emailing, writing and calling per the information found on your website at <http://www.nps.gov/inde/contacts.htm>, until there is a satisfactory and longstanding resolution to what we experienced.

I assure you that we want the very same thing you do—the best and most accurate tours at Independence Hall.

Respectfully,

Todd DuBord
Chaplain of Top Kick Productions
www.NationalTreasures.org

Endnotes

¹ When the NPS guide started speaking his historical distortions, I quickly grabbed a piece of paper and started scribbling many statements that he was saying. I initially recollected that he said the brief falsity, "George Washington didn't even attend church!" But then, having spoken to several others who were with me on the tour, I realized that the NPS guide's statement actually compounded his historical distortions by teaching that George Washington not only didn't attend church, but that there was no record or evidence to support that he did.

² <http://www.wallbuilders.com/LIBissuesArticles.asp?id=8755>

³ <http://www.wallbuilders.com/LIBissuesArticles.asp?id=8755>

⁴ M.E. Bradford, A Worthy Company: Brief Lives of the Framers of the United States Constitution, 1982.

⁵ http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_founding_fathers_overview.html

⁶ http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/constitution/bio.htm

⁷ http://www.usconstitution.net/states_god.html

⁸ <http://www.wallbuilders.com/LIBissuesArticles.asp?id=100>

⁹ <http://www.nps.gov/inde/forteachers/upload/Benjamin%20Franklin%20Lesson%20Plans%20Feb%202010.pdf>